History NEBRASKA

It's Thursday, January 30, 2020. In today's issue: Rudy Smith's "Black Experience"; unboxing archeology; exaggeration postcards; a Nebraskan responds to the abolition of slavery; Restore Nebraska Conference; Silver bugs of 1896; and the Ford Center goes over to the Dark Side.

History Nebraska, World-Herald co-publish new book

History Nebraska is proud to partner with the *Omaha World-Herald* to publish a new book this February. *The Black Experience through the Lens of Rudy Smith* will soon be available through Omaha.com and at the Nebraska History Museum.

During a 45-year career with the *World-Herald*, photographer Rudy Smith created a number of iconic images of major events, but that is only part of his work's historical significance. Even as he photographed the news and famous people of the day, he also made a point of capturing the community's smaller moments. He wanted the *World-Herald*'s readers to see each other's humanity in spite of the artificial barriers of race. In doing so, he used his considerable photographic skills to create an enduring portrait of the city.

Sadly, Smith died in December. This book was his final project. The Great Plains Black History Museum will be hosting an exhibit of Smith's work. Rudy's widow, Llana Smith, will sign books there on Feb. 15 and 29.

Unboxing Nebraska Archeology

In a new four-minute video, we're taking a look at some objects in our archeology collections that relate to the Central Plains Tradition People, who lived in Nebraska about 1000 to 600 years ago.

We're premiering the video in this email. Soon we'll promote it via social media channels. It's part of our ongoing effort to take people behind the scenes and show them not only what we've learned, but how we learned it. That's also an important theme of our archeology exhibit, *Piecing Together the Past*.

No exaggeration, these postcards are great

If you're a History Nebraska member, you've already seen "Nebraska's Exaggeration Postcards" by Jason Combs and Tate Combs in the current issue of *Nebraska History Magazine.* You may also have read about them in the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

The *Nebraska History* article tells how and why these postcards became a phenomenon in the early 1900s, and includes 38 cards from the Combs' collection. (Here are some from History Nebraska's collection.)

There's never a bad time to become a History Nebraska member, but the next few months might be the best time to do it. **For the next 13 weeks, we'll be doing a different weekly giveaway for new members!** Watch our Facebook page to learn more.

A Nebraskan responds to the abolition of slavery

A Nebraskan's letter shows us something that’s often forgotten when people talk about civil rights history. It hasn’t been a steady line of progress.

"It seems to be the growing opinion in all the departments of Government, that manhood and merit—not color or caste—should be the test of political rights or civil immunities," wrote D.H. Kelsey in 1866. The Plattsmouth man was living in Washington, DC, when the 13th Amendment (abolishing slavery) was ratified following the Civil War.

Kelsey's letter is a good example of the optimism and egalitarianism that flourished at war's end. But why, a century later, were people struggling for rights that Kelsey thought his generation had already won? Keep reading**.**

Restore Nebraska Conference, Feb. 28-29

History Nebraska is partnering with Restoration Exchange Omaha for this two-day event at Metropolitan Community College. It will unite homeowners, restoration experts, preservation lovers, government officials, developers, and others in an interactive and educational forum. You'll come away better able to preserve, restore, and renovate older properties. Learn more.

The Silver Bugs of 1896

This metal campaign pin requires some explaining today, but its meaning was clear to 1896 voters. Pictured at left is 36-year-old William Jennings Bryan of Lincoln, the Democratic nominee for president. The numbers at right represent the ratio of silver to gold coinage desired by Bryan's supporters.

What a boring issue, right? No wonder Bryan lost! But would you believe that the campaign of 1896 was one of the most impassioned in US history? This silver bug tells a story of money and power, desperate times, and a Cross of Gold. Keep reading.

Don’t let this happen to your heirlooms!

The staff of History Nebraska’s Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center warn about a not-so-dark force that can ruin textiles and other artifacts. If you’re involved with a local museum or have artifacts of your own, you need to read this.

The sneaky culprit? UV light. Ford Center staff demonstrate its cumulative effects and offer helpful advice.

Popular on HN blog and social media

The Equal Rights Amendment is back in the news after Virginia's recent ratification. Nebraska was one of the first states to ratify the amendment back in 1972, but withdrew its ratification the following year. Was that even legal?

Grand Island's "Seedling Mile" promoted the Lincoln Highway in 1915. A historical marker stands at a remaining section of original pavement.

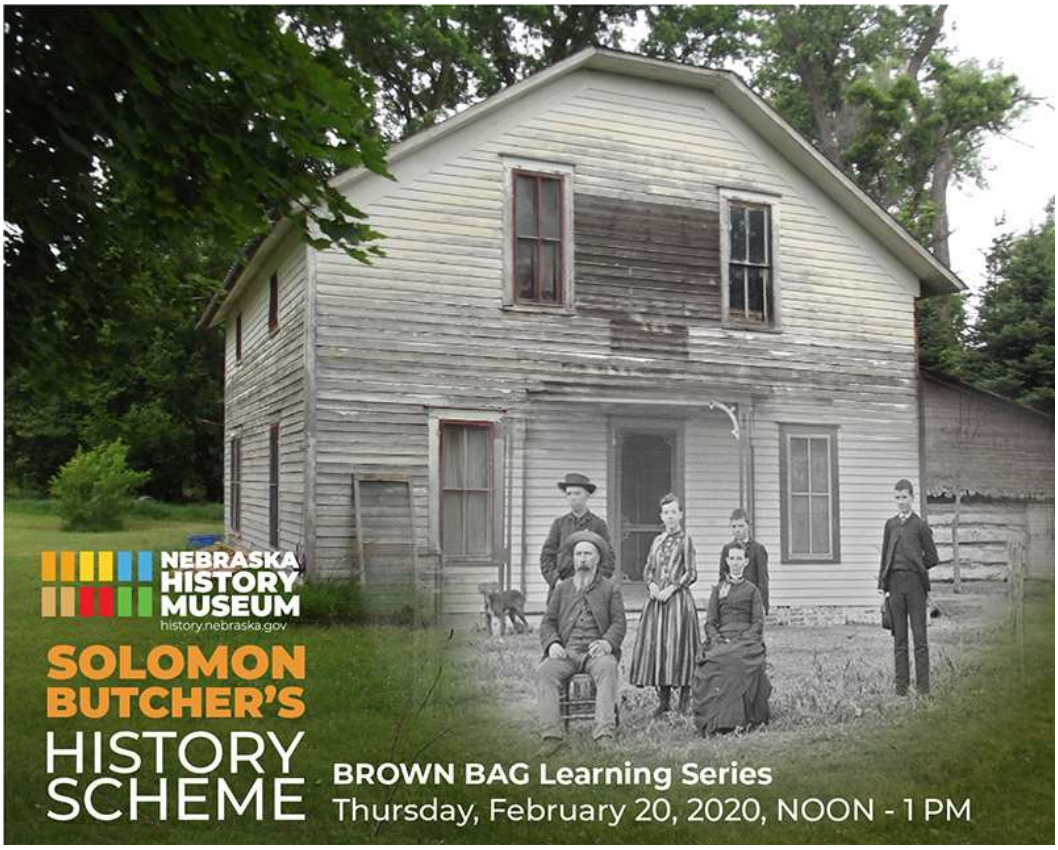
Before you complain about winter weather, watch our Schoolchildren's Blizzard video.

Speaking of winter weather, here's our disappearing capitol on Instagram.

Bowl season came and went without the Huskers. When was their first bowl game?

Here's an iconic photo of the Moses Speese family, Nebraska sod house pioneers, and one of Daniel Freeman, the Nebraskan who filed (arguably) the nation's first Homestead claim.

Upcoming events



Coming this month: "Nebraskans, Their Dogs, and World War II"; Homeschool Wednesdays; "Solomon Butcher's History Scheme"; and "The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote." Keep reading.

History Nebraska Newsletter, written by David Bristow, Editor, and Josh Lottman.
history.nebraska.gov
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Complete articles from HN Blog:

A Nebraskan responds to the abolition of slavery

An 1866 letter shows us something that's often forgotten when people talk about civil rights history. D.H. Kelsey of Plattsmouth was living in Washington, DC, when the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery, was ratified following the Civil War. (See below to learn how the 13th

Amendment differed from the Emancipation Proclamation.) The *Nebraska Herald* published his letter on January 3, 1866.

Kelsey praised the "great work of *national regeneration*," adding that for the formerly enslaved people, "it becomes a great and pressing question whether they shall be entitled to equal civil rights… and it seems to be the growing opinion in all the departments of Government, that manhood and merit—not color or caste—should be the test of political rights or civil immunities."

Hope for full equality in the 1860s? It sounds more like hopeful talk from the 1960s.

Kelsey's letter is a good example of the spirit of northern optimism and egalitarianism that flourished at the war's end. In 1867 Congress forced Nebraska to drop a whites-only voting provision in its constitution as a condition of statehood. Then in short order the states ratified the 14th Amendment (1868; equal protection under the law) and the 15th Amendment (1870; equal voting rights for men).

But the reason Kelsey's optimism sounds so premature is that Americans allowed the civil rights achievements of the 1860s to be mostly whittled away by 1900—leaving future generations to struggle for what Kelsey thought his generation had already won.

Here are more excerpts of Kelsey's letter:

"[T]he great work of *national regeneration* has been accomplished. The nation, baptized in fire and blood, has arisen to a new birth, and to a high and holy destiny. The hydra-headed and hundred fisted monster, 'Human Slavery' has fallen accursed of God and man, and the Republic now stands 'redeemed,' regenerated, and disenthralled by the genius of Universal Emancipation. While we mourn with those that mourn, let us also rejoice with those that do rejoice. The Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, like John the Baptist, heralded and prepared the way of deliverance; and yesterday, by the glorious announcement of the Secretary of State, the crowning act is announced by the Constitutional Amendment *de jure* and *de facto*. 'Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth: Good will to men.'

"As all men, regardless of color or caste, are now secured in the enjoyment of their equal Natural Rights, it becomes a great and pressing question whether they shall be entitled to equal civil rights, in other words, whether artificial distinctions, merely on account of the texture of the skin or *cuticle* shall be removed; and it seems to be the growing

opinion in all the departments of Government, that manhood and merit—not color or caste—should be the test of political rights or civil immunities. . . . [I]t is deemed especially important now, in the process of reconstruction and regeneration, to confer upon the loyal *black man* the civil privileges that are accorded to the unrepentant, disloyal *white man*. It is devoutly to be hoped that this matter will be settled on the principles of equal justice—that no hateful seeds of discord will be allowed to germinate and send their baleful influences through the restored Republic, so as again to threaten and culminate in the horrors of a civil war."

Image: An 1865 engraving by Thomas Nast reflects the optimism of the time. Library of Congress

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But didn't the Emancipation Proclamation end slavery in 1863?

While the Emancipation Proclamation applied to "persons held as slaves" in states or parts of states "the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States" as of January 1, 1863 (the Confederacy), it did not end slavery in the nation as a whole. The proclamation didn't apply to states that hadn't seceded, or to Confederate areas in Union hands by 1863. Lincoln didn't believe that the Constitution gave the president the authority to end slavery, so he justified the Emancipation Proclamation as a war measure under his powers as Commander in Chief of US armed forces. He advocated a constitutional amendment as a permanent solution. Both houses of Congress passed the amendment, which then had to be ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states. The process began during the Civil War and ended months after the war's conclusion.

A brief timeline of 13th Amendment events:

Apr. 6, 1864: Senate passes the amendment 38-6

June 15, 1864: House defeats the amendment 93-65 (lacking a two-thirds majority)

Dec. 6, 1864: Lincoln's message to Congress, urging reconsideration

Jan. 31, 1865: House passes the amendment 119-56 (subject of the 2012 *Lincoln* movie)

Feb. 1, 1865: Lincoln signs resolution submitting amendment to the states

(Lee surrenders Apr. 9; Lincoln is assassinated Apr. 14; last Confederate general surrenders June 23)

Dec. 6, 1865: Georgia ratifies, completing the process

Dec. 18, 1865: Sec. of State Seward announces that the amendment has been ratified

Adapted from "A Nebraskan Responds to the Thirteenth Amendment," by James E. Potter, Nebraska History News, *October-November-December 2015.*

Categories:
Civil War; slavery; African Americans; civil rights

The Silver Bugs of 1896

By David L. Bristow, Editor

This campaign pin from the Nebraska History Museum requires some explaining today, but its meaning was clear to 1896 voters. Pictured at left is 36-year-old William Jennings Bryan of Lincoln, the Democratic nominee for president. The numbers at right, 16/1, represent the ratio of silver to gold coinage desired by Bryan's supporters.

What a boring issue, right? No wonder Bryan lost!

But the campaign of 1896 was one of the most impassioned in US history. Bryan was both revered as a godly hero and denounced as a dangerous radical. The country was still reeling from a severe economic depression, and many farmers felt that banking interests had rigged the economy against them. Opponents accused Bryan of being practically a socialist and warned that he would wreck the economy instead of saving it.

Image: A cartoonist from Judge *magazine lampooned Bryan for using religious imagery to promote partisan political views.*

When's the last time you got into an argument about federal monetary policy? It happened a lot in 1896. At the center of the fight was "free silver" versus the gold standard.

This takes some explaining. In some important ways, money was different then. Today we have a federal reserve banking system ("the Fed") that controls the supply of money—not a simple task when the economy keeps changing. Too much money in circulation results in inflation; too little results in deflation and tight credit. Most of us don't really understand exactly what the Fed

does, but we recognize that it plays an important role in stabilizing the boom-and-bust cycles of the economy.

But in 1896 there was no Fed. The value of the dollar was pegged to the value of gold. Over the years the economy had grown a lot faster than the amount of gold in circulation.

That meant deflation. Prices fell, wages fell, and the value of a dollar grew. This was good if you already had a lot of money, or if people owed you money. But if you carried debt, as most farmers did, it meant you now had to pay back your loans in dollars that were worth more than what you borrowed. Bryan called this a "Cross of Gold" in his most famous speech.

Bryan and his supporters believed the solution was "free silver." This didn't mean literally giving away silver. It meant that the government would go back to minting silver coins, which it had stopped doing. The idea behind silver coinage was that it would expand the money supply and create enough inflation to ease debts and make credit easier to obtain.

Opponents wanted to keep the US on the gold standard. Supporters of Republican nominee William McKinley argued that gold made for a stable currency, which was good for business, and thus good for urban wage workers. McKinley supporters often wore yellow neckties or "gold bug" pins shaped like this one. (A savvy manufacturer apparently sold them to both parties.) The stinger, only barely visible here, was a lever that moved the wings.

The issue was argued in numerous books, pamphlets, speeches, and fistfights. The 1890s saw major droughts, economic depression, massive unemployment, violent labor strikes, lynchings, and widespread unrest. During such times, the silver issue became a focal point for many Americans' hopes and fears.

McKinley won the election and kept the nation on the gold standard. Why did he win? Opinions vary, but historians often emphasize two factors. One is that McKinley raked in huge donations from corporations and wealthy individuals, allowing his campaign to massively outspend Bryan. The other is that Bryan and the free silver platform appealed mainly to rural Americans and not so much to urban workers.

The "Free Silver" platform was dead, but Bryan himself was nominated by the Democratic Party twice more, losing to McKinley again in 1900 and to William Howard Taft in 1908. However, Bryan remained a powerful figure among Democrats for years, and served at US Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson.

Categories:
politics, William Jennings Bryan

Light Damage

Exposure to visible and ultraviolet radiation can be a significant factor in the survival of objects. All wavelengths of radiation provide energy for deterioration reactions that degrade materials; the more powerful the radiation the faster the deterioration.

On the left is a silk bedspread that has shattered after long-term exposure to light. On the right, is a detail shot of a Ulysses S. Grant doll. The light damage has turned his Union blues into Confederate gray!

Damage from visible and ultraviolet radiation is cumulative; it is not reversed or repaired by periods of reduced exposure. Objects cannot be "rested." Textiles are particularly sensitive to light exposure. Light not only fades dyes, but it can permanently degrade the textile fibers.

The board on the left hung in the objects lab near at north-facing window for over a decade. On the left, you can see where the light has faded the bottom half of the fabric swatches.

In 2009, the Ford Center staff carried out a long-term test with fabric samples and dyes. Scraps of plain cotton muslin were dyed with Procion dyes. The fabric samples were taped to an acid-free, lignin-free mat board and half of each piece was covered with blotter. The board was hung by a north-facing window and allowed to age naturally. The north-facing window gets less direct sunlight than if it faced any other direction and the board was not directly in front of the window. The windows also have a blinds and a UV filter. Even with those precautions, after ten years, you can see the effect of the light on the dyed cotton.

The print on the left has darkened due to photo-oxidation which has affected the paper support. The image on the right shows two photos, one was stored away from light, while the photograph on the right has faded.

Textiles are not the only items sensitive to the effects of light. It is important to protect paper-based items from overexposure to light, which exacerbates deterioration and causes discoloration. Once ink fades, it cannot be restored. Photographs are also susceptible to light damage, which can hasten deterioration of the emulsion layers as well as cause darkening of the support and fading of the image. A faded image cannot be brought back.

Light damage has bleached this table top to and caused the finish to crack and degrade. The dark areas are where an object, such as a lamp, stood on the table and blocked the light.

Light also plays a large part in the deterioration of furniture. It is known to bleach dark woods, darken light woods, and alter finishes, stains, or paints; the result leaves discolored, brittle, or cracked materials.

It is important to limit the **levels** (foot-candles or lux), **types** (visible or ultraviolet) and **length** of exposure (minutes to days of illumination) to visible and ultraviolet radiation in order to protect collection objects.

Many light sources produce both visible and ultraviolet radiation, as well as heat, and should be filtered for UV emissions, vented for heat dissipation, and used at the lowest visible light levels possible. Particularly when it comes to exhibiting museum objects, all natural light should be blocked or at the minimum filtered for heat, visible radiation, and ultraviolet radiation. Curtains,

blinds or shades can be closed, items can be moved out of direct sunlight, while awnings or shutters can be installed over windows.

Ultraviolet radiation is more harmful than visible radiation and is not required for human vision. It should be excluded from the museum environment and the home environment with UV filtering film applied to windows and overhead lights. The ultraviolet light levels recommended for museums should not exceed 75 microwatts per lumen.

Museums and homes should also consider changing out incandescent and fluorescent lighting for LED lighting. LED lights do not emit UV radiation or heat. Although initially expensive, the switch to LED lighting would greatly reduce the amount of electricity required for lighting. There would also be an associated reduction in cooling costs associated with the removal of hot incandescent light bulbs. Finally, the very long lifespan associated with LED lighting will reduce the number of bulb changes needed on a yearly basis.

Limiting exposure to UV light and heat can protect objects from irreversible damage, save money in the long-term and help the environment by reducing energy use.

Categories:
Gerald Ford Conservation Center, conservation